

Hezbollah - Capabilities And Role In The Middle East (Full Documentary)

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Hezbollah is a social and political movement with a strong armed wing. It was formed in 1980s. Hezbollah's creation was conditioned by the aspiration of the Shia population of Lebanon to meet the challenges of Israeli expansion and Western "new-style" colonialism.

The Hezbollah ("Party of God") movement was formed in 1982 in Lebanon by a segment of the Shia community displeased with the secular, in their view, nature of the Amal moderate Shia party. There were also disagreements concerning whether Israel should be confronted using new organizational forms and methods of warfare. According to its General Secretary Hasan Nasrallah, since its formation, Hezbollah was a purely intra-Lebanese creation, relying on the support and aid from the Palestinian and Lebanese parties, while the support from Iran and Syria came later.

Since the very beginning, Hezbollah's activities have been based on three principles. First, Islam is declared an ideological, doctrinal, and practical basis for the organization's functions. Secondly, its main aim is the struggle against Israeli occupation of Lebanon and Palestine and against Zionist domination. Third, it recognizes the Iranian Shia thesis concerning the necessity of Vilayat-e-Fakih. This Shia doctrine asserts that during the era of the 12th Great Reappearance of Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi the leadership over the Shia is transferred to high-ranking Shia clerics.

Structure and Decision Making

Hezbollah, as an organization, has a structure based on certain ideological principles and exists within the framework of a state, that has no actual influence on the movement's activities. The party is led by the Shura Council consisting of 7 members (six spiritual leaders—ulemas—and one secular leader). The members are elected by the Central Council (Al-Majlis al-Markazis), consisting of the 200 most authoritative members of the movement. Shura Council elections consist of three phases. The first is the candidate selection (usually 70-80), both clerics and secular individuals who satisfy the criteria set by the top leaders. Those who pass this stage have the right to participate in the second stage. In other words, they become candidates for the Shura Council. As a rule, 10-15 people make it to the second round. The final phase consists of the direct election of the 7 Shura Council members.

Council decisions are final and religiously binding for all party members. They are adopted either unanimously or by the majority of votes. If there is a deadlock or a split within Shura Council, issues are decided by the party leader, whose decisions are final and obligatory on all administrative institutions, and cannot be challenged. This is how the principle of Vilayat-e-Fakih is observed and splits within the ruling elite are averted.

The actual operations of the party are conducted by the administrative executive apparatus, known as Shura Tanfiz. It consists of five councils:

1. Executive Council (oversight over political and organizational matters, including social, cultural, and educational activities);
2. Politburo (addresses intra-movement matters);
3. Parliamentary Council (concerns itself with Hezbollah activities in the Lebanese legislature);

4. Judicial Council (issues religious resolutions and carries out arbitration on matters of disagreement, relying on Islamic law); and
5. Jihad Council (directs the movement, including oversight, recruitment, training, equipment, security).

Each council is usually headed by a Shura Council member.

The movement General Secretary is Hasan Nasrallah, who is also the supreme commander of its armed formations. Leadership also includes his deputy, a spiritual leader who is also the supreme judge, some Lebanese legislators, the military formation commander for Southern Lebanon, and regional leaders of the organization. The Executive Council has various departments responsible for specific areas of activity: welfare, healthcare, information, press, finance, external communications, coordination.

Armed Formations and Their Peculiarities

Assessments of Hezbollah's armed strength vary. Iran's FARS news agency data from October 2016 put Hezbollah's armed strength at no less than 65,000 troops, including reserves. Of them, 21,000 are professional soldiers with constant training. According to the 2017 Military Balance, currently 5-8 thousand Hezbollah troops are fighting in Syria.

Bekaa Valley: the commander's responsibilities include control over arms shipments from Iran through Syria for the "Sheikh Abdallah" military camp that's under joint command by the Hezbollah and the Syrian army. According to various sources, this region's forces consist of at least 7 infantry battalions with 252 people each. Three of them are motorized.

South Beirut: according to various sources, this region includes at least two battalions of 252 troops, one of them motorized.

South Lebanon: after the Taif treaty of 1989, Hezbollah formations were reorganized and placed under a unified command. The current commander is responsible for Hezbollah military and Special Security formations and may also command Lebanese Army units in South Lebanon. This region includes at least 7 battalions of 252 troops each, five of them motorized.

Moreover, one should note the nontrivial fact of the existence of a full-scale, by Iranian, NATO, and Russian measures, tank regiment. In November 2016, near the city of al-Quiseir (Homs province, Syria), there was an inspection of Hezbollah equipment. The photos showed T-55, T-62, and some T-72 tanks, some 2S1 Gvozdika howitzers, BMP-1, and -2, M113 APCs with 14.5mm machine-guns, ZSU-57-2 SPAA. Most of this equipment apparently came from SAA arsenals and was obtained from the Lebanese Army and possibly Iran.

Of most interest are the hybrids assembled using Kvadrat (SA-6) SAM tracked chassis and Soviet-era KS-12 85mm and Ks-19 100mm AA guns. While their effectiveness against modern aircraft and drones is doubtful, they are useful as direct fire support against land targets. Other interesting weapons are the modern Kornet ATGMs mounted on quadricycles. These self-propelled ATGMs are able to effectively fight any modern tank, including Israeli.

By all appearances, this unit was formed to prosecute the war in Syria, where thousands of Hezbollah fighters are constantly on the front lines. The absence of direct fire support such as tanks and artillery undermines the success of operations. Therefore it's logical to assume that Hezbollah decided to assemble an arsenal of its own armor and accompanying artillery to ensure battlefield success.

Being a fully-fledged political and military organization, Hezbollah understands that it is surrounded by enemies such as Israel and radical Sunni Islamists. Therefore having a tank regiment with experienced crews is of vital importance, as the unit represents a serious force by the standards of Lebanon and the adjacent countries. The prolonged civil war in Lebanon, the permanent stand-off with Israel, and now also the struggle against Sunni Islamists, in other words, the constant balancing on the edge between war and peace, makes the movement flexible in its command arrangements and able to quickly and appropriately react to emerging problems.

One can also draw the conclusion that the paramilitary wing of the Hezbollah, in spite of external attributes of a partisan movement, which it was 20-30 years ago, is gradually becoming a fully-fledged army with a training establishment, a command structure, and a logistical segment.

Cadre Selection and Training

The preparation of a future fighter starts at a very young age. Kids aged 6 are involved in discussions and as they grow, they receive more advanced political and religious preparation. A sample training regimen includes: Studying Koran, A day at the mosque, I love my country, How to run a household, Summer camp, I submit to my leader. Younger kids' uniform, as a rule, includes blue shirts with epaulettes, white scarves, and pins with the image of Khomeini.

Older boys spend several weeks during the summer in camps in the south and in Bekaa Valley, where they train and acquire survival skills while obtaining more in-depth religious preparation and studying their native language and culture.

Then they transfer to the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. One of the scouts' missions is helping the poor. According to the Scouts head, if kids who lost their father or their brothers were left to their fate, they would withdraw inwardly and develop psychological problems such as aggression.

At the age of 17, those who excelled at the Scouts become members of Taabia, or the reserves.

At the same time, education does not seek to promote absolute hatred toward Israel, despite what Western journalists love to depict. The education system is first and foremost based on developing a national and religious identity, the context in which the Shia community of Lebanon exists.

In an interview provided by a Hezbollah fighter, it was noted that those who choose political independence become social pariahs. Such people can't even visit their villages, given that the family and the society hate them.

Cadre troops are focused on combat training, and each receives a specialty such as an ATGM gunner, a sniper, or demolitions. Regular Hezbollah fighters undergo training in specialized camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran (under IRGC officer leadership). They conduct training for the rank and file and select outstanding individuals for special units. Some of them become commanders, others are selected for the Special Security Apparatus.

Taabia reservists are engaged in protecting villages and are selected from the Scouts. Cadre fighters and reservists undergo service in one of the districts: Israel-Lebanon border and the Litania river area—Nasr Brigade, north of Litania—Badr Brigade, Bekaa Valley—Haidar Brigade.

Each Hezbollah brigade in south Lebanon has a sector in northern Israel that it is supposed to occupy. Combat and special training in each brigade take into account local geography. One should also note that border terrain is fortified: there is a large-scale network of tunnels, bunkers, minefields. Using the tunnels, Hezbollah can concentrate large number of troops on the needed

attack sector without being spotted and attacked from the air

Due to fighting in Syria, Hezbollah opted to conduct training courses with reservists lasting 60-90 days. Commanders are also sent to the battle zone to obtain experience. Intensive operations and unavoidable losses have forced commanders and troops to remain in the war zone (murabata) for longer than their rotation periods. For the reservists, it was 15 days a year. Before the Syrian war, the border with Israel was considered such a zone. Currently, the rotation period in the Syrian war zone is 20 days and may be increased if the situation demands it. This is considered optimum, as it allows for having trained and rested troops available in case of any escalation on Israel border, and in Syria.

Here's an example of a news report regarding deployment of Hezbollah units from May 20, 2017. The Radwan special unit and others were fully withdrawn from Syria and replaced by the Badr Brigade which is stationed in the eastern and northern part of the Aleppo province. Aziz Brigade was withdrawn from the outskirts of Palmyra and al-Qaem Brigade temporarily replaced it there.

Moreover, the Radwan unit was brought to an elevated alert level and sent to south Lebanon (Litania river and Shebaa farms on Israel border). Al-Jalil Brigade, intended for operations in Galilee in case of war with Israel, remained on its permanent positions in south Lebanon. Nasr Brigade, which is directly under Hasan Nasrallah, remained in reserve.

The Radwan unit was named after the head of Special Security department Imad Mugniyeh (pseudonym al-Hadja Radwan) who was killed in 2008. The unit has much experience in raids and is the most prepared for urban warfare, which makes it irreplaceable in Syria. If there is a new war between Hezbollah and Israel, it will be in the first line of attack.

Military Doctrine. Specifics of Fighting in Syria

Hezbollah leadership reviewed its concept of operations after the start of the Syria war. Before the war, the emphasis was placed on defensive ops in built-up areas with small units to inflict maximum troop and equipment losses on the IDF while simultaneously shelling Israel using large numbers of short- and medium-range rockets.

In Syria, Hezbollah realized that it had to wage offensive ops in cities. Therefore it reconsidered its training system, increased its rocket arsenal, and provided more heavy weapons and recon systems.

The first operation where Hezbollah took offensive using large units was the battle for el-Quseyr in April-June 2013. Some 1200-1700 best-trained Hezbollah troops took part in the battle. They were divided into 17 detachments, with later division into teams of 3-5 troops. Prior to the attack, the command performed recon of the city and its approaches, then divided the city into 16 sectors, one for each detachment. Each region had its codename. During the battle, this allowed for command of forces using open channels of communication without the enemy being able to take any countermeasures. Hezbollah command undertook the direction of SAA tank and artillery units near the city. Considering that the city was in the Islamist hands for over a year and was well-fortified, the ratio of losses was nevertheless 5:1 in favor of Hezbollah. The battle showed that with proper organization, a fortified city can be effectively attacked by a small force.

As far as the military direction of Hezbollah units in Syria by Iran is concerned, it seems probable that Iran directs Hezbollah units down to battalion level (sometimes down to company) using IRGC specialists from the al-Quds Force. It can't be ruled out that IRGC specialists coordinate Hezbollah and local self-defense forces like the Kataib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq. Units smaller than a battalion don't warrant the provision of specialists. There is a need for a large number of trained

cadres able to command and provide assistance. One of the factors influencing cooperation in this instance is the language barrier—Arabic in Lebanon, versus Farsi in Iran.

Hezbollah became one of the factors which allowed to turn around the war in Syria, since its troops were able to fight in cities. The SAA, in 2011-12 was organized along 1970-80 lines to fight combined arms battles mainly against Israel. New realities have shown that this army was unable to fight as small units in the cities. Moreover, the SAA has not fought for a long time. Its last significant operations took place in 1982. Therefore it had no commanders with urban warfare experience. Hezbollah, on the other hand, has constantly fought Israel since the moment of its creation. Generations of commanders have honed their skills in the years of clashes and battles with the IDF, causing it serious losses during the 2006 war. Israel was forced to retreat from south Lebanon, and Hezbollah's reputation has risen to unprecedented heights.

Israel's military command is worried about Hezbollah's operations in Syria, since its paramilitary wing will now be able to wage offensive ops using heavy weapons and a huge number of short-, medium-, and long-range rockets.

The fact that Hezbollah has become akin to a regular army is confirmed by IDF's rethinking of its approach to the fight against it. First, IDF is preparing for fighting big formations, up to a brigade, whose task will be invading Israel and capturing villages or military bases. Second, it is paying special attention to combating tunnels, including technical and psychological preparation of its troops to fight in tunnels.

Rocket Arsenal

The movement's distinguishing characteristic is the enormous rocket arsenal which, by various estimates, contains between 50 thousand and 120 thousand weapons. And not merely an arsenal, but a whole system, from rocket part and fuel factories to storage facilities and camouflaged launch sites.

The existing land-based arsenal includes various short-range ballistic missiles, surface-to-surface missiles and multiple rocket launchers.

The existing land-based arsenal is reflected by the following table:

Name	Type	Producer	Caliber	Rocket weight, kg	Warhead weight, kg	Range, km	Amount in arsenal
Type 63	MRL	PRC (People's Republic of China)	107	18,8	8,3 (7,5)*	8,5 (7,9)*	Several thousand rockets, tens of launchers
BM-21	MRL	USSR (Syria)	122	57-75*	18-25*	15-30*	Several thousand rockets, tens of launchers
BM-27	MRL	USSR (Syria)	220	250-280*	90-140*	5-35*	Several thousand rockets, tens of launchers
Fajr-3	MRL	Iran	240	407	45	43	Several hundreds or thousand rockets, tens of launchers
Falaq-1	MRL	Iran	240	111	50	10	Unknown
Khaibar-1	MRL	Syria	302	524	175	100	Unknown
Fajr-5	MRL	Iran	333	915	175	75	Several hundreds or thousand rockets, tens of launchers
Falaq-2	MRL	Iran	333	255	120	11	Unknown
Naze'at 6H/10H	SRBM	Iran	356/457	960/1830	130/230	100/130	Unknown
Zelzal-1/2	SRBM	Iran	610	3500	600	200-250*	Tens of rockets, several launches
Fateh-110	SRBM	Iran	610	3450	500-650 *	200-300*	Tens or hundreds of rockets
Scud-D	SRBM	PRC (Syria)	880	6500	985	700	Unknown
C-802	SSM	PRC	360	715	165	120	Unknown
Yahont	SSM	USSR/Russia	700	3000	250	120-300*	Unknown

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* -depending on the specific variant.

MRL - multiple rocket launcher

SSM - surface-to-surface missile

SRBM - short-range ballistic missile

Most of the weapons come from Iran and Syria. The possession of Scud-Ds is doubted, including doubts of the Western media. This system requires qualified personnel and specialized equipment, since the rocket uses liquid fuel.

To assess Hezbollah's effectiveness, let's look at the shelling of Israel in 2005. At the start, according to Nasrallah, there were over 12 thousand rockets. Official Israeli police reports noted

3770 rocket strikes on the country, including 901 strikes in the cities. Thanks to civil defense, only 44 were killed and 1384 were wounded. One is also tempted to note that Hezbollah mostly used rockets with ranges under 100km and small warheads, as no SRBM strikes were noted. This was due the small number of SRBMs and Israeli effort to destroy them, which was partly successful. Hits by 600-980kg SRBM warheads would have had catastrophic consequences on cities. The presence of SSMs proved a surprise for Israel. On July 14, 2006, Israeli corvette Hanit was hit by a Chinese-made C-802 SSM launched from the short. The ship's air defense was turned off since nobody expected an SSM attack. 4 sailors were killed and the corvette was incapacitated for 3 weeks. The 165kg warhead most likely failed to explode, otherwise, the corvette would have sunk.

Having a large rocket arsenal made in Iran, PRC, and Syria, raises the question of whether Hezbollah has its own factories of rockets. If it does, they manufacture certain numbers. It's been a long time since the last war with Israel. Launching a rocket after lengthy storage could be dangerous to its launch crew. It would seem that the war in Syria is being used to use up old Russian and Chinese rockets of which it has large numbers. The situation is more complex with SRBMs. They are very expensive to make. It would make no sense to establish their production on territory which at any moment could be bombed by Israel. With proper servicing, such rockets can be stored for up to decades. It's likely that some assistance here is provided by Iranian civil and military specialists.

Building a rocket plant on the territory of another country is a whole different matter. In August 2017, Israeli media reported that Iranians are building a ballistic missile plant in north-west Syria. It is built near the coastal city of Banias, tens of kilometers from Tartus where the Russian base is located, and south of Hmeimim where Russian aircraft are based, protected by S-300 and S-400. Therefore the factory can be protected against Israeli strikes. According to experts, the plant will produce Fateh-110 rockets for the SAA and, possibly, Hezbollah.

The rocket arsenal has been modernized and expanded. At the start of the next war, Hezbollah will be able to launch 1500 rockets a day, instead of 200 in 2006, covering the whole territory of Israel and not only the border regions. There are reports that Hezbollah has Russian Yakhont SSMs obtained from Syria, instead of the unreliable C-802.

Therefore Hezbollah rocket arsenal is not a network of warehouses full of artisanal rockets, dangerous to own crews. It's a whole range of industrially produced weapons capable of destroying land and naval targets at various ranges.

All of the above does not mean Hezbollah seeks war with Israel, whose leadership should be aware that if there is another war in south Lebanon, Israel's civilians will face unprecedented threats.

Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence

Hezbollah's Special Security department is responsible for both intel and counter-intel, and implements several missions, one of the most important being professionally carried out operations abroad at the behest of Shura Council. Imad Fayez Mughniyeh was a head of Special Security department until 2008 when he died in a car bomb blast in Kafr Sousa neighborhood of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Responsibilities of the department's head in Shura include overseeing the following departments:

1. National preventive security apparatus, which provides personal security to high-level spiritual leaders.
2. Internal security and intelligence apparatus, which tracks political and religious reliability of the Hezbollah members.

3. National central security apparatus, which observes, tracks, infiltrates, and if necessary eliminates military or political individuals or groups seeking to interfere with Hezbollah in Lebanon.
4. Foreign combat cells and intel apparatus. This department partly overlaps with the central security council, depending on types of requests received by cell leaders.

Imad Mugniyeh is the individual who made this department one of the most powerful secret services in the world. He was born in 1962 in the Tayr Debba village in south Lebanon. He started his career in the mid-1970s in the FATH organization. In 1977-82 he was a member of its intelligence and special units (Force 17, Unified Security Directorate, etc.). After an advanced course under IRGC instructors at the Imam Ali base in Bekaa province, he headed the personal security team for prominent Shia cleric Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah.

Before 2005, Hezbollah was to a large extent integrated into Lebanese intel services, including Amn al-Amn Main Directorate for Common Security which expanded its ability to carry out intelligence and counter-intelligence ops. After Hezbollah was accused of being complicit in the death of former Lebanese PM, Rafik Hariri in February 2005, Hezbollah members were forced to leave Lebanese secret services, which affects the movement's intel work.

The Special Security department studies Iranian and Israeli experience. According to Israeli intel members, Hezbollah has a large agent network in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and AMAN military intelligence. This opinion is supported by the presence of limited access Israeli MOD maps, manuals, and documents on captured Hezbollah members.

The movement's intel successes are largely based on exploiting familial and criminal ties between Israeli and Lebanese Arabs, and the well-oiled cooperation between Hezbollah intel and Palestinian Authority armed formations. Moreover, Hezbollah intelligence often uses interrogations of captured officers and soldiers, and data obtained through recruitment of senior Israeli officers. For example, Hezbollah was able to recruit IDF Lt. Col. Omar el-Haiba, a Bedouin. This officer occupied a high post in the Western district HQ. He was one of the most capable Bedouin officers in the IDF. After a serious wound, he was disabled but nevertheless returned to the IDF and earned awards for his agitation among the Bedouins. This officer was arrested on suspicion of giving Hezbollah secret information on IDF forces on Lebanon border and the schedule of patrols. On June 18, 2006 a court martial sentenced him to 15 years in prison for espionage, contact with enemy agents, and drug trade.

Due to the secrecy regime in Special Security Apparatus, little is known about foreign terrorist and intel cells. As a rule, they become known only after major events. Hezbollah selects people for special ops from among its own special units. These people are believed to be well trained and prepared to die for the sake of the mission. Some of them are from Arab and Islamic organizations that have ceased to exist. All of Hezbollah's special ops are handled by Special Security apparatus, with support from Iranian and Syrian intel and special ops forces, and from the IRGC.

Members of the overseas cells are thoroughly trained. They have knowledge and information about the country where they work. They speak the language of the country. This attracts less attention from civil and military authorities.

Infiltration unit equipment includes Israeli or other military uniforms, depending on the mission. Units infiltrating Israel speak Hebrew, use Israeli weapons and equipment as camouflage, and are familiar with all types of weapons used in the region. Members of special infiltration units and members of the suicide units differ, among other things, by their uniforms. For example, Jihad Detachments wear green or black clothing, carry Semtex, C-4, or C-9 charges, and usually wear masks on operations.

The following Jihad Detachments are known:

1. Islambula Brigade: assassination of political activists.
2. Al-Quds Brigade: two units of suicide bombers consisting of 56 each, the Fathi Shkaki Company and the Ihye Ayasha Company.

On Imad Mugniye's initiative, in the early '90s a special unit of Hebrew-speaking Lebanese Palestinians was formed. It had the task of eavesdropping on IDF army frequencies. Later, SSA sought to improve their language and professional skills at the Center of Islamic Science and Culture and its branches in Iran, Cyria, and Lebanon.

One should note that the Hezbollah units and controlled territories are targets of Israeli human intelligence efforts. Israeli Border Police (MAGAV) includes the YAMAS unit which camouflages its members to look like Arabs. During the 2006 war, Hezbollah counterintelligence located and destroyed an Israeli agent network in south Lebanon and Beirut. The network conducted espionage in Hezbollah HQ and transmitted this data to the IDF. Agents from among local population set up equipment to monitor Hezbollah military installations and used GPS devices to guide munitions, spread glow-in-the-dark powder around buildings and command centers, rocket warehouses and launch sites. Still, IDF and Israeli intel was not able to kill or capture a single senior Hezbollah official or destroy the command system, since the shelling of Israel continued no matter what.

The Media: Agitation and Propaganda

Hezbollah places particular importance on the media. It owns a satellite TV channel (al-Manar), four radio stations, and five newspapers. Without any doubt, Hezbollah's image was to a large extent formed by al-Manar, which has been broadcasting since June 1991, and has gone satellite in 2000. It has become Hezbollah's face to the world. The channel is unique, before its existence Arab media consisted of newspapers and radio stations. Experts believe its audience is second only to al-Jazeera. Al-Manar became the official channel of the movement, demonstrating accomplishments, particularly in the realm of fighting Israel. Its broadcasts consist mainly of news and political programs, broadcasts dedicated to the memory of martyrs, informational and entertainment shows. It is also unique in that it broadcasts in Hebrew for the Israeli population. While Western media depict the al-Manar as propaganda for a terror group, the channel does not broadcast any information on making bombs, executions of Israeli soldiers, blowing up of checkpoints, and other forms of cruelty.

Hezbollah radio stations al-Nour and al-Iman broadcast from southern Beirut. Al-Islam broadcasts in south Lebanon, and Sawt al-Mustad'afin broadcasts in the area of Bekaa river valley. There are also newspapers: Al-Bilad, al-Ahd, al-Muntalaq, al-Sabil, and Baquitou Allah.

The movement has a website, www.mogawama.org. Its content includes the most important news from Lebanon and the world, video addresses by movement leader, respecting the memory of martyrs, opinion polls, and memorable dates in the movement's history. Agitation video broadcast by TV and web channels are of high artistic and directorial quality and take into consideration the preference of the audience and Arab mentality not only in Lebanon but the world.

Social Work

Even though the Hezbollah is known in Western media as a terror organization, it defies that label by the multifaceted aspect of its activities. Apart from fighting in Syria and against Israel, it is part of Lebanon's legislature, provides education and medical services to the Lebanese. In 2000-2010 Hezbollah spent several billion dollars on humanitarian efforts in Lebanon. The organization builds

kindergartens and schools, hospitals and clinics, and even supermarkets. Its fighters and their family members can take advantage of many services with major discounts. Education in Hezbollah-built schools is cheaper than in public schools. The poor obtain stipends. Of course, the education focuses on the Arabic language, Islam, and Shia traditions. But English language and physical sciences are also taught. These schools provide a very high level of instruction by ME standards.

The media also focus on those who fell for the freedom and independence of Lebanon. As a sign of respect for the martyrs, which is how Shia community views them, the funerals are attended by senior officials. They also participate in any funerals of people who perished in battle or in other circumstances. This is apparently due to Hasan Nasrallah's having suffered a personal loss. His eldest son Hadi became a martyr during fighting in south Lebanon.

If the killed fighter had children, they are taken under care, receive education or jobs. In spite of financial problems, providing money for cadre soldiers and for the families of the dead is the top priority.

Mu'assasat Jihad al-Bina' or the Fund for Sacred Struggle was founded by the Hezbollah in 1988. It quickly became one of the most visible NGOs in Lebanon. Although it is autonomous, its activities fall under the purview of the social services department of the movement. Its main aim is to "lessen the burdens faced by the poor families by relying on God's aid in fulfilling their moral and Islamic obligations." The Fund operates in southern districts of Beirut, Bekaa Valley, and south Lebanon. The fund provides more than half of population of those regions with water, helps farmers with procuring livestock, fertilizers, fuel. It carries out electrification of the most backward villages.

Mu'assasat al-Shahid, or the Martyrs' Fund, supports the children of killed or captured fighters and civilians. It provides housing, jobs, and support for widows and runs a job placement office for the youth.

Lujnat Imdad al-Khomeini, or the Khomeini Support Committee, was formed right after Israeli aggression of 1982. It helps poor families, particularly those which suffered from Israeli occupation. The aid includes monthly benefits, food parcels, basic necessities, clothing, health services, and education. The committee provides medical assistance, including through medications, diagnoses, surgeries, and rehabilitation, to tens of thousands of patients a year. The financial and technical incapacity of the Lebanese government, particularly the Ministry of Health, forced the movement to take under the control of the Islamic Health Unit the hospitals of south Lebanon.

Hezbollah education department is headed by an office titled **al-Ta'bia' al-Tarbawiyya**, or the Education Directorate. It provides financial aid to needy Hezbollah members. Its expenditures are extremely important to the movement, because public schools suffer from lack of funds for construction and education technology.

The education department also provides needy students higher education in applied sciences, and religious studies in various institutions such as Technical Institute of the Great Prophet, the Technical Institutes of Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, the Institute of Sayydat al-Zahra', the Institute of Shaykh Raghib Harb, and the Islamic Shari'ah Institute.

Other types of aid include paying for textbooks and school materials, and part of the tuition in public and private schools.

Economic and Financial Activities

A variety of sources of funding—donations, business, and Iran's support—ensure the party's

independence and economic stability. Its assets are held in the Saderat Bank of Iran or in other banks in accounts of front individuals, to prevent the US and the West from freezing its assets. The party is a huge corporation whose assets belong to the whole party, not just specific individuals.

The main sources of funding are:

- Direct subsidies from Iran, no more than \$100 million per year, though \$200 million before the fall of oil prices.
- Contributions by Shia community in and outside of Lebanon
- Profits from economic and banking activity.

Income from smuggling, illegal sale of weapons and drugs, are not taken into consideration in this context

According to Pew Research Center and the World Factbook (CIA), Shia Muslims represent a high percentage in about 25 countries.

Country	Shia population (million)
Iran	76
India	40
Pakistan	24
Syria	up to 3
Iraq	20
Yemen	11
Azerbaijan	9
Turkey	8 .
Afghanistan	4,5
Saudi Arabia	4,5
Nigeria	4
Tanzania	2
Lebanon	1,8
Bahrain	1
Kuwait	0,9
Germany	0,4
UAE	0,4
USA	0,35
UK	0,3
Sweden	0,2
Oman	0,2
Qatar	0,15
Canada	0,1
Argentina	0,05
Brazil	0,05

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Total: approx. 200 million worldwide.

One should keep in mind that Pew data have often been criticized by Western experts and Shia diasporas for underestimating Shia numbers.

According to World Labor Organization, average salaries in these countries in 2016 were:

Country	Average monthly \$	Average annual \$
India	140	1680
Pakistan	140	1680
Turkey	530	6360
Qatar	3000	36000
Bahrain	800	9600
Kuwait	2150	25800
Oman	1000	12000
UAE	2000	24000
Saudi Arabia	700	8400

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The Islamic concept of Zakat states that when it comes to deeds performed in God's name, including supporting warriors waging jihad, the poor, or people propagating Islam, the average worker should contribute 2.5% of their salary.

Considering the multi-child families which are the rule in Muslim countries (one does not consider non-working wives and children), zakat may be paid by up to 10% of the community.

In this case, contributions by country look as follows:

Country	Average annual contribution \$	10% of total Shia	Average contribution by Shia community per year, \$ million
India	42	4000000	170
Pakistan	42	2400000	100
Turkey	160	800000	128
Oman	300	20000	6
UAE	600	40000	24
Saudi Arabia	210	450000	94,5
Qatar	900	15000	13,5
Bahrain	240	100000	24
Kuwait	645	90000	58
Total			618

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Thus, the Shia diaspora may contribute no more than 1/5, or 120 million USD, for financing Hezbollah.

This calculation does not include income tax, since each country has a different tax law. One should also keep in mind that not all Shia in the West and Persian Gulf are supportive of Hezbollah's military aid to Syria. For example, NGO surveys of Shia in the Persian Gulf states in the second half of 2013 suggests that the percentage of supporters fell to 30-50%. This is apparently due to the Hezbollah being given an image of the aggressor by the media of these countries, which can't help but influence financing. After IS was proclaimed in 2014, India's Shia issued a statement proclaiming readiness to send 30,000 volunteers to Iraq to fight radical Islam. There is no information concerning the Shia of India or neighboring countries providing aid for Syria.

More than 100,000 Lebanese have permanent residence in African countries, including 60,000 in Cote d'Ivoire, 25,000 each in Senegal and Sierra Leone, 16,000 in Nigeria, 6,000 in DRC, 5,000 each in Gabon and Cameroun. The majority of Lebanese in Africa are not Christians but Shia. They have concentrated control of much profitable business, which allows them not only live well but support their historical motherland. In 2008 alone, money transfers from African Lebanese exceeded \$1 billion. It is difficult to assess Lebanese Shia affluence in Africa due to the never-ending financial crisis. Since it is Hezbollah that runs active social programs in Lebanon, one can assume the majority of remittances ends up on the organization's accounts.

Overall, the movement collects no more than \$500 million a year. It's not much, considering it is waging a war in Syria and is financing the social sector of the whole country.

Why Hezbollah became a Middle East powerhouse and its transition to a quasi-state

After the IDF withdrawal from most of Lebanon in 1985, Hezbollah with active support from the IRGC began to create its own weapons arsenals, and the January 1989 Damascus-Tehran agreement allowed Hezbollah to restore its military infrastructure and resume operations in south Lebanon. Thus by 1991 Hezbollah became the leading Lebanese resistance force, operating in the country's south against the IDF.

Starting in early '90s, Hezbollah began a transition away from being a purely paramilitary formation. In the summer of '92, Iran's leaders recommended Hezbollah transform itself from an openly extremist organization into an active Lebanese political force. Hezbollah reached an internal compromise between the "moderates" and "radicals", established a ceasefire with Amal, and began active preparation for parliamentary elections. Hezbollah today acts as the leading political force in Lebanon and as a major Shia social and humanitarian organization (Lebanon has an estimated 2.5 million Shia out of 6.2 million total population). IDF withdraw from south Lebanon in 2006 was a huge victory in the eyes of the Arab world. Hezbollah has truly become a significant regional factor. Growing its influence in Lebanon and Syria and the region with Iran's help, Hezbollah has become a base for recruitment, training, and preparation of volunteers for battling Israel and radical Sunni organizations. Hezbollah units often fight like regular army units.

One of the reasons for the rise of Hezbollah's regional influence is the strategic coordination between the Lebanese and Iraqi Shia, and also Syrian Alawites due to the continuous war in the Middle East. It's important to note that the organization has proved its worth even in the darkest hours of Lebanon's history, such as the many years of almost uninterrupted slaughter, but also during the perennial clashes with its external adversaries, even dangerous ones like Israel.

Opinions of Iran's influence vary. Some experts claim Iran's aid is so important that it fully affects all

aspects of Hezbollah's decision making process. Naturally, Iran's authority as the leader of the Shia around the world is near-absolute. It also provides Hezbollah with tremendous military aid. Moreover, the movement has suffered losses in Syria, its most professional and best trained fighters have perished there, which weakens the organization. Therefore Hezbollah leaders have to show more flexibility and care in its dealings with Iran if differences of opinion arise.

The most likely explanation is that Hezbollah maintains considerable independence due to its exceptional political standing in the country, and of its nature as a strike force against Israel and Syria's Sunni. Since the start of conflicts in Syria in 2011, Nasrallah tried to maintain neutrality. Hezbollah became involved only in 2013 when the situation grew out of control and there was a danger of combat spreading to Lebanon. Nasrallah stated in one of his announcements that "Iran should be viewed as the center of strategic influence in the region, as the model of a sovereign state which supports nations in their search for independence and as a force which helps countries and nations of the Middle East become stronger. Syria and Iran can't force Hezbollah to act against its own plans. They can only argue with us and try to convince us."

Since its independence, Lebanese government paid little attention to the problems of the southern parts of the country. Therefore Hezbollah has assumed the role of helping the poor and developing infrastructure not for self-promotion, but because it was an objective necessity. Practically since birth, a Lebanese Shia is under Hezbollah's care. Kindergartens, clinics, schools, and institutions—all of that has been built and is financed by the movement. So it's no surprise that the movement is hugely popular and service within its ranks is considered honorable.

One should especially note that today Hezbollah is more than a movement. Even though it has not declared sovereignty over part of the country, it has every attribute of a state. It has legislative, executive, judicial authority, institutions for the collection and distribution of taxes, its own education system, a military, intelligence and counter-intelligence, media—all of that exists and functions within the movement's framework. Moreover, it has control over its subjects, the totality of information about them and, most importantly, it relies on their good will to work with the movement in some form. The concept of citizenship is not after all defined by a passport but by the individual's willingness to associate to a state or a movement and be loyal to it.

Here's what is written about it by one of Hezbollah's ideologues and the deputy general secretary, sheikh Naim Kassem: "From the theoretical point of view, we are calling for an Islamic state, we are drawing others into that process, since only an Islamic state may facilitate the maximum of human happiness. But on the practical level this question depends on **the free human choice**, in addition to the Quran Ayat 2.257: There is no compulsion in religion. The correct way is quite separate from the false one. Whoever does not believe in idol worship but believes in God, has found a reliable foundation which cannot be crumbled. Verily, God is all-hearing and all-knowing."

The victory of radical Sunni groups in Syria would mean the possibility of merciless annihilation of all other religious groups, following the Iraq scenario. After the US invasion of Iraq triggered a civil war and later the appearance of ISIS, which proved unspeakably cruel toward all other beliefs, it sent the message that in these conditions of ethnic and religious warfare, only paramilitary organizations like the Hezbollah can ensure their own survival.

Conclusion

Hezbollah's popularity among Lebanese Shia is based on several factors: its military campaign against Israel, its wholly Lebanese nature, its role as a defender of the historically repressed Shia community, its religious nature and its wide range of social services.

Hezbollah has done more for the Shia community in Lebanon than the official government. Since the very start of its involvement in the war in Syria, the movement leaders that its fighters are defending Lebanon, Lebanese Shia, and Shia holy sites from the spread of extremist Sunni Islam, represented first and foremost by Jabhat al-Nusra and IS. According to Nasrallah, this was not a war of choice but of necessity.

Lebanese NGOs which carried out a survey in 2015 noted that 57% of respondents view the threat of radical Islam to Lebanon as real, and 80% view Hezbollah as making the life in Lebanon calmer. Lebanon today, just as the Middle East as a whole, is experiencing renewed inter-religious and inter-communal slaughter. People living in unstable and unpredictable countries are trying to find protection and support among their own national or religious community. Therefore it is no surprise that Hezbollah enjoys such unconditional support among the Shia of Lebanon and Syria, even if they don't fully support the movement's aims and mission.

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